

DRAPER (W.H.)

2

HENRY BERTON SANDS, M.D.

In Memoriam









Pres<sup>d</sup> by

J-Fordyce Barker

---

NYC

WAR DEPARTMENT,  
SURGEON GENERAL'S OFFICE,  
U. S. ARMY MEDICAL MUSEUM AND LIBRARY,

Corner 7th and B Streets S. W.,

*Washington, D. C.,*





H. B. Sand



A

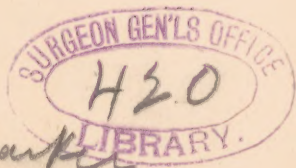
MEMORIAL OF

DR. HENRY BERTON SANDS

READ AT A MEETING OF THE MEDICAL AND SURGICAL  
SOCIETY, NOVEMBER 23, 1889

BY

WILLIAM H. DRAPER, M.D.



*Presented by Dr. Farcher Barker  
June 4/91.*

PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE SOCIETY

*⊗ Died Recently.*



A MEMORIAL OF  
DR. HENRY BERTON SANDS.

READ AT A MEETING OF THE MEDICAL AND SURGICAL SOCIETY,  
NOVEMBER 23, 1889.

BY WILLIAM H. DRAPER, M.D.

An explanation is due to the Medical and Surgical Society for this late report of the Committee, appointed nearly a year ago, to prepare resolutions upon the death of Dr. Henry Berton Sands. My colleague, Dr. Ball, thought that the memory of Dr. Sands, one of the oldest and most distinguished members of our Society, deserved a higher tribute than the mere formality of obituary resolutions, and that I, from my long and intimate association with him, was the proper person to record our appreciation of the character and achievements of our departed friend.

A long illness, which began soon after Dr. Sands' death, compelled me to abandon all work for several months, and has prevented my undertaking this sad but grateful privilege until now. A year has elapsed since Dr. Sands died, but I believe I am justified in saying that we can yet scarcely realize that he is dead, and that we are to-day as conscious of the charm and power of his personality as we were when he vanished with such appalling suddenness from our presence. We still look for him in his accustomed places, we wait for the sound of his voice and watch for the flash of his wit. So deep and clear was the impression made by his keen individuality that he may be truly said to live in our memory, and we are only conscious of his absence when we seek in vain for his counsel and can no longer grasp the hand that was so ready and so able to help.

I do not propose to give the historical details of Dr. Sands' career; these are familiar to most of us, and besides, the incidents and achievements of his life are not what most

interest us now that he has gone. The essential character of the man, the spirit that determined his conduct and shaped his destiny, are what chiefly engage our attention and excite our interest. I desire, therefore, rather to point out, as I may be able, what the qualities were which contributed to his distinction as a surgeon and his success as a teacher.

Whoever knew Dr. Sands must have been impressed with a sort of electric force about him which was exhibited in his glance, in his movements, and in the working of his mind. He had a singular acuteness of intellectual vision, he saw things as they were, and was rarely deceived by sentimental considerations, by personal predilections, or by accepted traditions. He did not waste his energies on insoluble problems, but was eminently, practical, and preferred to work in the paths which promised progress. He had an insatiable desire for demonstration, and would take nothing on faith. He was intolerant of theories, suspicious of authority, and always a remorseless critic.

When he determined to study medicine, his choice of surgery for a professional career was to him a perfectly natural one.

From the time when we were associated as students, though he was the private pupil of a physician, Dr. McCready, he manifested a preference for surgery, and this preference was based upon purely intellectual grounds. I well remember that at our first visit to Bellevue Hospital, he fainted at my side on seeing Dr. Parker demonstrate the false point of motion in an ununited fracture, and yet in spite of this natural sensitiveness to the sight of suffering, which would have discouraged a less ardent and determined spirit, he was from the beginning an enthusiast in espousing the superior claims of surgery as a branch of the healing art. He seemed to seize at once upon its points of vantage over medicine, and to have a sort of prophetic instinct of its possibilities.

He was fond of contrasting the definite and tangible results of surgery with the vague and presumptive conclusions of medicine, and would

sometimes repeat the old opprobrium medicorum to justify his want of interest in an art which so often left its votaries in doubt, when a sick man recovered from disease, whether the doctor had had any thing to do with curing him, and when he died, whether it was disease or the doctor that had killed him.

Dr. Sands, however, was not attracted alone by the objective benefits of surgical procedures, he found in the principles of surgical pathology a more substantial and scientific basis for the establishment of rational methods of cure than appeared to exist in the principles of medicine. At the same time he was not so dominated by his preference for surgery that he did not then and always realize the importance to the surgeon of a thorough training in the principles and practice of medicine.

He entered Bellevue Hospital in the medical division, and having completed that service he spent a year in the surgical wards. A large general practice in the early period of his professional life, however, only served to intensify his interest in the achievements of surgery, and



to exaggerate, if possible, his distrust of the claims of medicine to a scientific basis.

I suppose I am not the only one present who has felt the sting of his sarcasm when he exposed, as he loved to do, the uncertainties of medical diagnosis, or pointed out, perchance, the speedy and effective results of surgical treatment where medicine had failed to accomplish its purpose. Every incursion of surgery into the field of medicine, and every surgical triumph over medical therapeutics, would rouse in him a gratification which was sometimes akin to glee.

His zeal in surgery was stimulated by every step in its progress, and from the beginning of his career by abundant opportunities for the acquisition of experience. He was successively attached as Attending Surgeon to Bellevue, to the New York Eye Infirmary, St. Luke's, the New York, and the Roosevelt hospitals. In the last institution he enjoyed, for five years previous to his death, the largest surgical service in the city. He was among the earliest in this country to recognize the



significance and the value of antiseptics in its application to surgery, and in the revolution which it produced in the surgical art he was among the foremost and most zealous spirits. He saw how it was destined to widen the field and enlarge the powers of the surgeon, and he did more, perhaps, than any of his contemporaries to perfect the technique and demonstrate the success of antiseptic operations.

It is hardly necessary for me to say to those who knew Dr. Sands well, that his love for surgery and his zeal for its progress never led him beyond the limits of a wise conservatism. The critical faculty in him, fortified by the most laborious research, and refined by a singularly acute perception of the value of evidence, was always brought to bear in the solution of surgical problems, and rarely failed to justify his conclusions and crown his work with success. It might be asserted of him, perhaps, that he was not what would be called in these days an original or an enterprising surgeon. He was very jealous of the fair fame of surgery, and hesitated always to run

the risk of bringing discredit upon it by hazardous procedures. It is possible that he sometimes withheld his hand when he might have used it with signal success, but there was certainly no one who, when he was convinced that the limits of the art had been extended by new methods, was more ready than he to acknowledge and adopt them.

He was, in its best sense, a conservative surgeon; not the slave of absolute rules and traditions, but enlightened by all true progress, and advancing always with a sure if cautious step. He was a dexterous and rapid operator, self-possessed in the presence of every emergency, and fertile in resources. He often told me, in the latter years of his life, that the mere performance of an operation, however serious or difficult, never gave him the slightest anxiety. He was always confident that he could accomplish what he set out to do; the real difficulty was to satisfy himself of the wisdom of surgical interference and the chances of success.

He had some controversies with his contem-

poraries respecting certain surgical procedures which, in his judgment, were not based on sound pathological principles or justified by practical experience.

It is well known, for example that in the operative treatment of perityphlitis he was inclined to a conservatism which some of his compeers did not approve. This conservatism arose from his views as to the frequency of the extra-peritoneal site of perityphlitic abscess. This led him to be particularly, and perhaps in these days needlessly, cautious in advising laparotomy, even as an explorative procedure in perityphlitic disease. It is a curious and interesting fact, however, that less than two years before his death, Dr. Sands performed the first successful laparotomy for a case of septic perforative peritonitis. In the published record of this case he sets forth, in a masterly review of the whole subject of perityphlitic inflammations, the principles of diagnosis and surgical treatment in these affections, which have already led to the saving of many lives. The history of Dr. Sands' labors in this particular field of

surgery shows how patiently and with what abiding faith he sought by his own experience to solve a difficult problem ; how gradually, but how surely, he cleared the path that finally led him to what must be regarded as the most brilliant and useful achievement of his life.

Dr. Sands' career as a teacher began with his entrance into professional life ; first as Demonstrator of Anatomy, subsequently and for twelve years as Professor of Anatomy, and finally as Professor of Surgery, in the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

It is not surprising that Dr. Sands' success as a teacher was a brilliant one, or that this success was achieved in the subjects of anatomy and surgery. It would have been impossible for him to have taught any thing which was not capable of demonstration. It was perfectly natural to him to take delight in shattering the idols of medical tradition, and as an iconoclast he lent a helping hand in his own department, but he loved to teach what was exact, and what his knowledge and experience confirmed. Though he was probably not excelled

in erudition by any of his contemporaries, for he was a master of surgical literature, his lectures were never used to display his learning, but simply to expound principles and practice as his own mature judgment and experience dictated.

Dr. Sands' personal influence as a teacher was remarkable, and resulted not less from his own vivid interest in his work than from his capacity for instructing. There was probably no man among his immediate predecessors or contemporaries, excepting the late Dr. Parker, who had so large a number of private pupils, and there is certainly no higher tribute to his conspicuous ability as a teacher than the fact that he always attracted the ablest students, and that a considerable number of the most distinguished surgeons in this city and elsewhere were first inspired by his precept and example. He could not tolerate a dull man, and he would not waste his energies on a lazy one, but he was quick to discern ability, and by his sympathy and zeal animated those who possessed it with an exalted ambition and a love of work.

There was no subject which interested him more, nor one to which he gave more freely of his time and thought, than the improvement of medical education. His colleagues in the College of Physicians and Surgeons will, I am sure, justify me in saying that no one worked more ardently or more wisely than he in inaugurating the reforms that were wrought in his time in that institution. His views in regard to extending the term of tuition are well known. He believed that even with the best preliminary training it was impossible in these days to equip a man for the practice of his profession in less than four years. He sought especially to enlarge and perfect demonstrative teaching, and he was particularly interested in improving the methods of hospital instruction. It is well known that, in the face of much opposition from hospital managers and the profession, he advocated the reorganization of the service of attending staffs by substituting continuous duty for the short and intermittent service which still generally prevails. He maintained that the essential prelimi-



nary step towards the improvement of clinical instruction in practical medicine and surgery is to train by large and continuous experience in hospitals the men who are willing and desirous to consecrate themselves to the service of teaching. He believed that every hospital appointment carried with it the responsibility of utilizing the experience for the benefit of students and the profession. To attain this end successfully he thought that it was better to give a few men the privileges of continuous training than to distribute them among a large number, the majority of whom would make no use of their positions for educational purposes. Dr. Sands lived to see this idea partially recognized by some men of liberal views in hospital management, and he demonstrated by his own brief but brilliant career as Surgeon-in-Chief of the Roosevelt Hospital the immense clinical benefits to be derived from the system he advocated. We believe that he is entitled to the credit of inaugurating this genuine reform in hospital service, and that under the stimulus of his powerful influence and

example it will ultimately be generally adopted. Had he lived, it was his purpose to publish a report of his five years' experience in the Roosevelt Hospital. The materials for this report had already been largely prepared, and it is to be hoped may yet be completed. It would present the strongest possible argument in favor of continuous service, and demonstrate the enormous privileges for valuable clinical instruction which, under the system now prevailing, go to waste.

Dr. Sands' style as a lecturer was a natural reflex of his mental activity. His utterance was so rapid that it required the most fixed attention to follow him. His language, though devoid of rhetorical embellishment, was singularly clear and forcible. He possessed a facility of expression in writing as well as in speaking which was exactly suited to his lucid and alert intelligence. He spoke always what was in his mind with a candor, and sometimes with a cruel sort of incisiveness, that left no possibility of doubt as to the honesty of his purpose or the positiveness of his conviction. He had



a keen sense of humor and was fond of rail-lery, but in all that was serious his motive and his conduct were characterized by sincere interest and the most gentle and considerate judgment. He had a remarkable memory, and the ability to quote from the literature of surgery as well as from his own experience, which all who have heard him speak in this Society will well remember. His knowledge was comprehensive, and his command of it was singularly ready. He had an incisive way of exploding a theory, exposing the weak point of an argument, or demonstrating an error in diagnosis, that was generally all the more effective because it was done with such quiet and unexpected alacrity. There have been few men in this Society during the last twenty-five years who have contributed so much valuable personal experience to it as he did, and few, if any, who had in such large degree the critical faculty which is useful in measuring the value of the experience of others.

In his social relations Dr. Sands was to all who came into intimate contact with him a truly

delightful companion. By his intense vitality he seemed to quicken the spirit and enliven the intelligence of those about him. He had a most responsive wit, a sort of exaggerated mental reflex, which made conversation with him a real intellectual refreshment. As I have said he had a keen sense of humor, and he would sometimes discomfit his opponent in an argument by ridicule. In this way he occasionally gave the impression, I have no doubt, to those who did not know him well, that he was too nimble of speech to be ever really serious-minded, but to those who knew him better and who might need his counsel or crave his sympathy he was always a wise, thoughtful, and generous adviser.

He was a curious spender of his time, and his sense of the value of it made idleness impossible to him. He was one of the most industrious men I ever knew. It was a matter of conscience with him to be always abreast of the literature of the surgical world, and his career from the beginning, even in spite of his failing health in the last three years of his life, was one

of steady and unremitting progress. I doubt if there could be found among his contemporaries a man who more completely epitomized the growth of the surgical art in the last twenty-five years.

Though eminently successful in private practice and enjoying always a liberal income from his work, it may be truly said that the pecuniary emoluments of his profession were a secondary consideration to him. He devoted a large portion of his time to hospital work, and often said that he preferred a large experience to a large revenue. He certainly never limited his experience by excessive charges. I have said that he was a curious spender of his time, I ought also to mention that he had as jealous a regard for the time of others as he had for his own. He was remarkably exact and punctual in his engagements, and used to say that he would as soon rob a man of his money as of his time.

He was fond of music, and in his early life was an excellent pianist. He derived the keenest enjoyment from the works of the classical com-

posers and found in them his chief relaxation. It is a singular circumstance that he was looking forward to the enjoyment of music at his own house on the fatal afternoon when the veil was drawn that separated him forever from all earthly labors and delights.

In this imperfect sketch of the character and personality of our lamented associate, I have endeavored to describe him with a fidelity which should not be distorted by affection. He was for nearly forty years my companion and friend, and if I have seemed to exaggerate his intellectual gifts, his rare attainments, and the value of his useful life, it is because I still feel the inspiration of his presence and must ever acknowledge the force of his example.

He was certainly a most conspicuous figure among his contemporaries. He leaves a name which will be honored in the annals of surgery, and a memory which must ever remain a precious heritage to his family and friends.









